



Lucy 302723 - What to Expect

Lucy is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Lucy is a sensitive, playful girl who is ready to find her forever home. Lucy needs an understanding owner that is experienced with feline body language and has the time and desire to allow her to acclimate in her own time. Lucy may never be a social butterfly with everyone she meets, but she will bond with her new family when given the time she needs to get to know you.

Lucy was transferred to OHS from a shelter in Texas, and we do not have much history on her. When she arrived at the shelter she displayed fearful behavior, crouching low, hiding, and hissing when staff attempted to engage with her. After several weeks with no change in her behavior, she was placed in the Behavior Modification Program. The environment in the BMOD program is more conducive to helping cats feel comfortable in a shelter environment. With the larger kennel space, access to windows, and increased one on one time with the team we set out to learn more about her and help her overcome her fears.

When she first arrived in the Behavior Modification program, Lucy hid for several days and would hiss and back away when we approached her. We worked on building trust and confidence by talking to her calmly and getting her used to our presence by just sitting close by her. We noticed she liked watching bird videos so we would often play them for her. Because she showed an interest in the bird videos, we thought she would be interested in engaging with feather toys. We used feather toys to build a positive association with people by moving them quickly across the floor to gain her attention. We then started soaring the feather wand toys through the air and she would watch, chase and pounce on it with great delight. She is also regularly seen playing with toys in her kennels when she is by herself. She loves all kinds of toys. She also loves treats, especially Churus and we used them to continue building a positive association with people. Lucy showed an interest in coming out of her kennel to play with the other cats in the program, so we let her do that. She gets along well with the kitties she has met here as long as they are respectful of her space. Overtime, she began to trust the team more and now she regularly meows at us asking for us to play with her. She is still nervous with hands approaching her and being pet, but she has allowed several of her human friends that she has made here to pet her. When her friends are petting her, she will lean in, roll around and make biscuits. Her new family should expect to continue working with her on this as it will take time for her to build trust and confidence with new people. If you have the time and patience, you will end up with a sweet, playful, social girl. Once a bond and relationship are formed with people, she will lean in for cheek and chin scratches. Her favorite activities are playing with toys, eating treats, and relaxing in the best sunspots

Her new family should expect that she will hide for a few weeks, possibly longer. You'll need to introduce her to new things slowly. Lucy typically runs, hides, and hisses when overwhelmed or scared. It's important to provide her with a small room with appropriate hiding spots for her to relax in, such as her own hidey bed. Hiding spots that are confined to a tight spot and out of reach from you will make it difficult to build a bond with her. **She should not be given access to the whole home setting until she has acclimated to one room. The room you set her up in will be the catalyst for how quickly she acclimates.** Start thinking now which room in your home would be best for Lucy to settle into. If it's a bedroom, can she get under the bed or dresser making it difficult to spend time with her? If it's a laundry room or bathroom will the constant in and out of people and noises associated with these rooms be too much for her? By having a room without a lot of foot traffic and with appropriate hiding spots, it will allow you to work on building a relationship. While in her hiding spot, use calm voices and offer tasty treats and toys to show you are not a threat. Place a small amount of a wet food or a treat on a spoon and offer it to Lucy while in her hidey spot. Over time, by continuing to do this, Lucy will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food/playtime = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

Here's how to help Lucy during your first months together:

Confine Lucy to one cat-proof room in your house. Provide Lucy with a litter box, food, water, and a bed. Ensure she cannot get to *inappropriate* hiding spots (under the bed, in a closet, on top of a cabinet, etc.). Provide her with a safe, comfortable hiding place instead like her cat carrier, a hidey-bed, or a large dog crate covered with a blanket.

Spend time with Lucy in her room. Don't force her out of her hiding spot. Instead, encourage her to come out on her own using happy talk, offering a toy or treats. Once she is using the litter box, eating regularly, and coming out of hiding to interact with you, you can start introducing her to the rest of your home. Start by propping the door open and allowing her to come out on her own. Don't force it! If you come across something that you can tell Lucy is worried about, allow her to hang back or hide if she chooses to do so.

Continue to provide a safe space. Even when Lucy has started exploring the rest of the house, give her a safe space to which she can retreat. When she is in her safe space, insist that guests leave her alone and try to ignore her yourself. That way, when she comes out, you can reward her bravery with your attention.

No visitors (at first). Allow Lucy time to adjust to your house, routine, and lifestyle before introducing her to new people. When you have visitors over, give Lucy the freedom to make the decision to interact (or not!). Ask new people to ignore her – or if Lucy seems curious or interested, have the new person toss her treats or offer a favorite toy. We want exciting, good things to come from new people.

Practice crate training. Leave her carrier out all the time, so it's just a part of her normal environment. Add a bed and keep the door securely propped open so she can go in and out on her own, making sure the door won't swing shut and frighten her. You can also clicker train her to run into the carrier on cue. Helping Lucy get comfortable with her carrier will make it easier when it's time to visit the vet.

Visiting the vet: Unless it's an emergency, give Lucy time to bond to you before taking her to the vet. Vet visits will more than likely be scary, but if she already trusts you, your presence may help her feel more comfortable.

Patience will come in handy for you. Lucy is a cat that needs an understanding owner who has the time and desire to allow her to adapt in her own time. She may never be a social butterfly, and that's okay! Getting to know her and watching her come out of her shell will be extremely rewarding. Celebrate those small victories.

We're here to help!

We want Lucy to be successful in her new home. We're available to answer questions via phone and email. Call the Behavior Helpline at (503)416-2983 or email Erika at erikas@oregonhumane.org to connect with the Feline Behavior Modification Manager.

Please keep in touch so we can continue to help you and Lucy now and in the future. Please reach out if you have any questions or concerns – or just to give an update. We love to see photos and hear how our friends are doing!

Thank you for adopting from the Oregon Humane Society. Congratulations on your new cat!